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Charting The CIA Course

President Jimmy Carter's nomination of Admiral Stansfield Turner to head the Central Intelligence Agency reopens the still unsettled question of the CIA's exact place in the American governmental structure.

Gaining a clear definition of the CIA's future course should emerge as an integral part of the process by which the Senate determines whether the 53-year-old naval officer is the right man for the job.

Turner has had an outstanding military career since he and Carter were graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1946. But there is little in his public record to denote his views on the CIA's role, what he would do to prevent a repetition of past abuses and how he proposes to combine CIA accountability to Congress with a proper measure of secrecy.

The CIA was created to serve as the primary organization for U.S. intelligence activities. Intelligence is indispensable to

help preserve this nation's safety from its enemies. But that should not give it license to involve itself in domestic spying or brazenly interfere in the affairs of foreign countries.

Americans can hope that with guidance by a President who has pledged high moral conduct by his administration, the CIA will be motivated to confine itself to necessary and proper activities. That hope is bolstered by the presence of a permanent committee set up by the Senate last year with broad powers to monitor the agency's operations.

This is an opportune time, at the very outset of a new administration, to establish the true function of the entire American intelligence apparatus. It puts special emphasis on the coming hearings by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence on Admiral Turner's credentials for the demanding CIA post.